

Responses to Child Labour in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has ratified the two ILO core conventions on child labour (i.e., Minimum Age Convention No. 138 and Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182), but policies and concrete interventions for addressing the child labour problem have yet to be put in place. The Government has expressed its desire to formulate and implement a National Plan of Action against child labour and participate in the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. However, resource constraints have prevented any serious follow-up to this. Discussions are yet to take place towards the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with ILO/IPEC.

At the regional level, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, adopted in July 1990 in Addis Ababa by the Conference of Heads of State and Governments of the Organization of African Unity entered into force in November 1999. It is the first regional treaty that specifically deals with the problem of child soldiers. This convention was ratified by the Ethiopian government in October 2002. Ethiopia has also ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in May 1991. Since then, various measures have been taken to make the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child widely known to adults and children in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Government has introduced the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP) strategy to reduce poverty. However, the SDPRP I (2001 – 2006) strategy did not include explicit measures against child labour, neither does its successor programme, the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP).

National Legislation on Child Labour

Constitution: Article 36 of the country's Constitution is totally devoted to the cause of children. It states that every child has the right to life, name and nationality, and the right to not be subjected to exploitative labour practices, and to be free from corporal punishment or cruel or inhuman treatment.

Family Code: In July 2000 the Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000 was issued. The code seeks to give priority to the protection, well-being and upbringing of children in accordance with the Constitution and international instruments which Ethiopia has ratified. According to Article 215 of the Revised Family Code, the law places the care and protection of a minor (child) under a specified organ. The Code lays down rules of procedure for the sanctioning of such organ where said organs fail to discharge their functions to the detriment of the child (Art. 245-249).

Labour Law: Article 89(2) of the Labour Proclamation No.377/2003 prohibits the employment of persons under 14 years of age. Sub-article (3) of the same Article prohibits the employment of young workers (persons between 14 and 18 years of age according to Article 89(1) of the Labour Proclamation) to perform work which, on account of its nature or the circumstances under which it is carried out, is harmful to the life or health of the young worker.

Criminal Code: The Criminal Code of Ethiopia contains provisions concerning the production and trafficking of drugs (Art. 525), enslavement (Art. 596), trafficking in minors for compulsory labour (Art. 597) and trafficking in minors for prostitution (Art. 636). Accordance to Article 525/(c) of the code, the use of children (minors) for the production and trafficking of drugs is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment and a fine. However, procuring or offering a child to carry out such activities has not been made a punishable criminal offence.

National plan of action for children

Preparation of a national plan of action for children for the years 2003-10 is one of the measures taken to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour in Ethiopia. According to the "Country Response on Violence against Children" (¹), the major components of the national action plan for children 2003-10 are: (a) providing quality education; (b) providing health facilities, clean water, sanitation, food and nutrition; (c) combating HIV/AIDS; (d) protecting children against abuses, exploitation and violence; (e) providing assistance to children in especially difficult situations; and (f) reducing child labour. The implementation of this programme is the responsibility of a national children's affairs steering committee led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The development of education

As part of the first Education Sector Development Programme in the mid-1990s, the government eliminated school fees and embarked on an ambitious school-building programme. Between 1996 and 2005, the number of primary schools increased by 55 per cent, mainly through expansion in rural areas (³). However, enrolment grew faster doubling between 1999 and 2005, while the number of teachers employed increased by 75 per cent only. As a result, both classroom overcrowding and the pupil/teacher ratio (PTR) increased, with worrying implications for quality.

During the period 2000 – 2006, the primary and secondary school gross enrolment ratios of males were 107 per cent and 41 per cent respectively, while the corresponding figures for females were 94 per cent and 28 per cent (³). Based on the data available from EFA Development Indicator (EDI), between 1999 and 2005 progress was substantial in Ethiopia where the EDI increased by more than 10 per cent. Although Ethiopia is among the countries with low EDI category, the country is moving rapidly towards Education For All (EFA) (⁴).

Mainstreaming Child Labour within Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP) Strategy

The appropriate strategy to reduce child labour and improve the working conditions to acceptable standards and at least to eliminate the worst forms of child labour is to tackle the root causes, notably poverty, that force children into inappropriate work.

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Note 1 - Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Country Response to the Questionnaire on Violence Against Children, by The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Submitted to: The UN Secretary General's Independent Expert on the Study on Violence Against Children, May 2005.

Note 2 - Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2005

Note 3 - The State of the World's Children 2008, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), December 2007.

Note 4 - EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, Published in 2007 by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization.